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In July 1967, the California State Board of Education set minimum probation standards for junior colleges, providing that (1) students having less than a 2.0 GPA (with 12 or more units attempted) will be put on academic probation, (2) all such students will receive special counseling, and (3) those failing to maintain a 1.75 GPA for three consecutive terms will be dismissed. Anticipating the effects of these standards on its own system, Shasta College decided to review all its penalty grading and probation practices. The probation statistics of first- and fill-time freshmen for the 1966-67 year and the projected and actual figures for the 1967-68 year were examined. Comparison of the figures showed that a 10% increase in probations could be expected, requiring a corresponding increase in counseling service. It became apparent that, after due consideration of non-academic influences on the student's possible success, the counselor had three possible recommendations--remedial courses, a limited unit load, or change of major. It was concluded that the counseling could be greatly improved by giving more attention to the initial choice of major, making sure it comes close to the student's apparent ability. It was also felt that an unlimited withdrawal policy would do much to protect the student's GPA, allowing him to drop a specific course at any time during the term without penalty. Instructors agreed with the lenient withdrawal policy, considering it a protection for their own grading standards. (HH)

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A STUDY OF PENALTY GRADING AND PROBATION PRACTICES AT SHASTA COLLEGE

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INTRODUCTION

California junior colleges were notified by the State Board of Education that on July 1, 1967, a minimum probation standard would become manditory for all junior colleges. The essential provisions of this new standard were: (1) Any junior college student failing to achieve a 2.00 grade point average (on a four-point scale) while attempting 12 or more units would be placed on academic probation. (2) All students placed on academic probation would receive special academic counseling. (3) Any student who failed to maintain a 1.75 grade point average would be dismissed from the college after his third consecutive semester of attendance.

The standards in effect at Shasta College differed from the new state-wide standard in one important respect; Shasta College had long placed students on probation when their grade point averages fell below a 1.75. Since a great many students at the college carried grade point averages between 1.75 and 2.00, it was anticipated that the new standard would significantly increase the number of students going on probation and receiving special academic counseling. Initially, school officials intended only to find what the increase in counselor load would be under the new standard, but after some consideration, it was decided that a complete review of all penalty grading and probation practices would be appropriate before the new standard took affect. This study is a record of the cooperative efforts of the college administration, the Scholastic Standards Committee, and the counseling office to understand and make corrective changes in the penalty grading and probation practices of the college.

PLAN OF THE STUDY

As in most institutional research, it was not possible in this study to achieve the level of systematic observation and control which typifies the behavioral research

laboratory. These qualities were, however, recognized as desirable and were employed as conditions would permit.

In the first phase of the study, the institutional practices relating to grading and probation were reviewed, a study group was identified, statistics relating to grading and probation were gathered, and the options open to counselors in dealing with probationary students were categorized. In the second phase of the study, changes were planned in penalty grading and probation practices through an analysis of relevant variables. This included an investigation of the relationship between student success and specific majors, the relative effectiveness of counselor options in dealing with probationary students, and a consideration of the "W" grade as a solution to the problems of penalty grading. In the third phase of the study, experimental changes in penalty grading and probation practices were introduced. Results of the study were gathered and conclusions drawn.

I. Description of Penalty Grading and Probation Practices at Shasta College

Grading standards of the college: Shasta College has long maintained the four-point grading scale common to California junior colleges. In such a scale, 4 points are allowed for each unit of "A" work, 3 points for "B" work, 2 points for "C" work, 1 point for "D" work, and 0 points for "F" work. In addition to this standard scale, until the 1967-68 school year, four other grades were used: The student received an "E" grade if he attended the course through the final examination but failed to complete a required assignment for the course. If the assignment was not completed before the sixth week of instruction of the succeeding semester, this "E" grade was changed by the registrar to "F". The student received a "W" grade if he officially withdrew from the class through the counseling office

before the sixth week of instruction. If the student failed to officially withdraw from the class before the sixth week of instruction, he received either a "WP" grade or a "WF" grade. The "WF" grade carried the same grade point penalty as the "F" grade.

The assignment of "WP" "WF" grades was subject to wide individual interpretation by the instructional staff. While some instructors would automatically assign a "WP" grade to the student who failed to come to class, the "WF" grade was just as automatically assigned in as many cases. The interpretation of penalty grades was further complicated by the practice of many instructors of simply carrying a student who failed to attend class on the roll book until the end of the semester and assigning an "F" grade. The assignment of penalty grades in cases of irregular withdrawal was so widespread that the majority of the work of the Scholastic Standards Committee of the college consisted of considering petitions for removal of penalty grades which had been assigned upon the irregular withdrawal of the student. It became apparent to the committee that penalty grades were as often an indicator of immaturity as they were an indicator of the student's ability to perform in class.

The cost of the penalty grading system used by the college can never be accurately determined. The time spent by the Scholastic Standards Committee is one way of estimating the cost. The fact that the great majority of students who received a semester grade report of withdrawal failing grades have never returned to the college is another way of estimating the cost.

Since the Scholastic Standards Committee tended to look with favor upon any grade change request where it could be established that the student left school prior to the sixth week of instruction or where the student was actually receiving a passing grade upon withdrawal from the class, emotional confrontations

among students, instructors, the counseling office, and the committee were all too common. It was decided by the Scholastic Standards Committee that a different approach to penalty grading would be desirable.

Probation statistics for the 1966-67 school year and projected probation statistics for the 1967-68 school year: It was deemed important to determine the probable extent of increase in the number of students subject to academic probation in the 1967-68 school year when the new probation standards would go into effect. A study group was selected from the student population for this purpose. The entire student population was not used since it was anticipated that several measures of the characteristics of the study group would be made over an extended period of time. The group identified for the study was first- and full-time freshmen, those students with no previous college who were enrolled for twelve or more units, completing the fall semester of 1966. This group was chosen because it could be accurately identified, the students in the group were exclusively a product of the educational program at Shasta College, and the group could be followed over an extended period of time.

In the fall of 1967, immediately after enrollment figures became known, a second study group was selected. This group was composed of all first- and full-time freshmen completing the fall semester of 1967. These two groups were used for comparison purposes throughout the study. Upon selection of the second study group, an estimate was made of probation statistics for the 1967-68 school year under the new probation standard. Table one shows the probation statistics for first- and full-time freshmen beginning college in the fall of 1966 and the projected probation statistics for first- and full-time freshmen beginning college in the fall of 1967.

Table I

Actual and Projected Fall Probation
Statistics for Full-time Freshmen

	Fall 1966	Projected Fall 1967
Total first- and full-time freshmen completing fall sem.....	737	828
Students with G.P.A. between .00 and 1.75.....	185 (25%)	207 (25%)
Students with G.P.A. between .00 and 2.00.....	77 (10%)	83 (10%)
Total expected on probation in fall 1967.....		290 (35%)

Table one shows that an increase from 25% to 35% of beginning freshmen students going on academic probation could have been expected in the fall of 1967 as a result of the change in the probation standard. A check of the statistics for beginning freshmen against the general school population showed that, after the initial high withdrawal rate for freshmen, they did not differ from the general school population.

Counselor options in dealing with probationary students: Since a 40% increase in students receiving academic counseling was expected, it became important to review the options to the counselor in dealing with students on academic probation.

It would be an exhaustive task to catalog all the things that counselors "do" when dealing with a student on academic probation. A new entry would probably have to be made for each student seen. Helping the student plan his program and seeing him successfully through it is, undoubtedly, the heart of the counseling function of the junior college counselor. It is possible, however, to catalog the

institutional tools provided to the counselor for dealing with students on academic probation. Approached from this point of view, most colleges find their list rather short.

At Shasta College when a student is placed on academic probation for the first time, a letter is sent to him at his home address indicating his probationary status and advising him to contact his counselor. He is not required to see his counselor, but he is urged to do so. If the student fails to remove probation during the next semester, he is then required to see his counselor before he is allowed to enroll for classes. It is after the student has been on academic probation the second semester that the counselor will exercise one of several options in controlling the student's program.

When the counselor is faced with a student who has been placed on academic probation for two semesters, he will first try to determine if some outside influence, such as a personal difficulty or an excessive work load, is affecting the student's performance. If such an influence is seen to be adversely affecting performance, the counselor may allow the student to continue with a full unit load in the same major with the correction of the difficulty. If the student's performance seems to be related to motivation or to his ability to perform in the courses in which he is enrolled, one of several kinds of controlled program will be required of the student. He may be required to enroll in one or more remedial courses to establish an adequate background for the major he has chosen; he may be required to limit the number of units for which he enrolls; or he may be required to choose a major more in keeping with his abilities as a condition of enrollment. These then are the specific options provided by the college for counselor use in dealing with probationary students: remedial courses, a limited unit load, and change of major.

II Analysis of Relevant Variables in Planning Changes in Penalty Grading and Probation Practices

The relationship between student success and specific majors: If change of major is to be regarded as an important institutional tool for dealing with probationary students, the relationship between student success and major certainly ought to be considered. Success in a major course of study is unquestionably a highly complex and individualistic matter. Success for the individual student in a given major is most probably the result of differing patterns of ability, motivation, and opportunity, as well as the ability of the college to present the course work included in the major in such a way that the student can profit from it. Nonetheless, if counselors are to assist the student in choosing a new major when he is doing poorly, knowing the overall success rate in the new major might prove helpful. Table two shows the relationship between the initial choice of major for the students in the fall 1966 study group and the number of students who withdrew in the fall and spring semesters, the number of students going on probation in the fall and spring semesters, and total number of students persisting three consecutive semesters.

TABLE II

PERSISTENCE RATE AND COLLEGE MAJOR

Majors with a Persistence Rate Greater
Than the Mean Persistence Rate

Majors	Initially Enrolled	First Semester		Second Semester		Enrolled 3rd Semester	
		WD	G.P.A. -2.00	WD	G.P.A. -2.00		
Biological Science	19	1	7	1	7	10	53%
Chemistry	2	-	1	1	1	1	50%
Chiropractic	2	-	1	-	1	1	50%
Engineering	43	3	7	4	15	26	58%
English & Literature	24	-	5	2	4	13	54%
Forestry	27	4	16	6	8	13	48%
Geology	2	1	1	-	-	1	50%
History	10	-	7	-	2	8	80%
Home Economics	6	-	1	-	2	4	66%
Journalism	3	-	1	-	1	3	100%
Law	10	-	4	1	2	5	50%
Laboratory Technician	3	1	1	1	-	2	66%
Letters & Science	27	1	11	6	6	19	70%
Mathematics	9	2	-	1	2	4	44%
Medicine	8	-	2	1	2	4	50%
Music	9	2	-	-	1	5	62%
Optometry	1	-	-	-	-	1	100%
Physical Education	17	2	8	1	3	8	47%
Physical Science	1	-	-	-	-	1	100%
Physics	2	-	-	-	1	1	50%

Majors with a Persistence Rate Greater
Than the Mean Persistence Rate ---- Cont'd

Majors	Initially Enrolled	First Semester WD	First Semester G.P.A. -2.00	Second Semester WD	Second Semester G.P.A. -2.00	Enrolled 3rd Semester	
Political Science	7	-	2	1	-	4	57%
Psychology	16	2	6	3	3	8	50%
Social Science	13	-	3	-	4	10	76%
Social Welfare	12	-	5	3	3	8	62%
Sociology	2	-	1	-	1	1	50%
General Education	55	9	28	7	14	27	51%
Undeclared	33	3	10	7	8	15	45%
Agri-Business	13	-	4	2	3	6	46%
Agriculture (Vocational)	17	6	4	1	4	8	50%
Auto Mechanics	34	4	8	5	10	15	45%
Electronics	16	4	7	1	2	9	56%
General Business	4	-	2	-	2	2	50%
Heavy Duty Equipment	17	3	4	4	1	8	47%
Natural Resources	18	2	7	3	4	8	44%
Police Science	25	7	6	3	5	13	52%
Registered Nurse	11	-	2	-	-	8	73%
Technical Engineering	2	-	1	-	1	1	50%
Subtotal	520	57 11%	173 37%	65 14%	123 30%	281 54%	

Majors with a Persistence Rate Less
Than the Mean Persistence Rate

Majors	Initially Enrolled	First Semester		Second Semester		Enrolled 3rd Semester	
		WD	G.P.A. -2.00	WD	G.P.A. -2.00		
Architecture	9	2	4	1	2	-	00%
Business Administration	59	15	20	9	16	19	32%
Commercial Art	11	2	3	-	4	3	27%
Dentistry	7	1	5	-	3	2	29%
Fine Arts	11	2	4	2	3	4	36%
Foreign Language	3	-	-	-	-	1	33%
Game Management	11	3	2	1	6	4	36%
Industrial Arts	4	2	1	1	2	1	25%
Pharmacy	3	-	2	-	1	1	33%
Philosophy	2	-	-	-	1	-	00%
Pre-Nursing (RN)	22	4	7	8	6	7	32%
Speech - Drama	5	-	4	2	1	1	20%
Teaching (Elementary)	2	-	-			-	00%
Teaching (Secondary)	1	-	-			-	00%
Veterinary	6	3	1	1	-	1	17%
Accounting (Vocational)	11	1	3	3	4	4	36%
Business Management	28	6	7	4	8	10	36%
Carpentry	5	1	-	2	-	2	40%
Clerk - Typist	22	6	7	1	8	5	23%
Machine Tool	4	1	-	1	0	1	25%
Real Estate	3	2	-	-	-	1	33%
Sales & Merchandising	10	1	3	2	3	3	30%

Majors with a Persistence Rate Less
Than the Mean Persistence Rate ---- Cont'd

Majors	Initially Enrolled	First Semester		Second Semester		Enrolled 3rd Semester	
		WD	G.P.A. -2.00	WD	G.P.A. -2.00		
Technical Drafting	17	4	5	1	4	7	41%
Subtotal	256	56 22%	78 39%	39 19%	72 45%	77 30%	
Separated because the following were one-year programs;							
Cosmetology	17	2	3	7	1	2	12%
Secretarial	49	7	7	8	6	15	31%
Secretarial Skills	21	4	1	5	4	3	14%
Subtotal	87	13	11	20	11	20	
Combined Total	863	126	262	124	206	378	

The comment which must be made at the outset about table two is that the number of students representing each major is inadequate for specific judgement on the relationship between the initial choice of major and student success. It is quite likely that many of the majors represented by small numbers of students would show great fluctuations on all measures of student success if more students were included in the sample. When considering the majors below the mean persistence rate of 44%, however, one would not expect all measures of student success to be low if only a chance relationship existed with regard to overall persistence.

As it turns out, all indicators of student success are low. These majors are not only below the average in persistence third semester, table two shows they are low on the probation measures as well. It, therefore, seems likely that the initial choice of major is related to later student success, but no precise statement can be made about the individual major without further data. Mention might be made of the persistence rate of students who initially specify a "general education" or "undeclared" major. These are generally considered to be high risk majors in terms of both withdrawal and persistence. The data seem to indicate that this may not necessarily be the case. Certain declared majors, such as Business Administration, seem to be far more predictive of future academic difficulty.

All business related majors appear low in persistence. This is an overall trend and is, therefore, important to note. It would appear that the student who declares a business related major is less sure of his purpose than a student who fails to declare a major. This large number of students with low persistence and a strong likelihood of going on probation should certainly be of concern to the business department and the counseling staff of the college.

The "W" grade as a solution to the penalty grading problem: It has been suggested that the counselor has two general alternatives at his disposal beyond assignment of specific remedial classes in dealing with probationary students. Change of major was identified as one of these alternatives; limiting the class load is another. Although a reduction to 7½ units is the standard set forth in the school catalog for limiting the load of probation students, a search of the records indicates that the number of units a student is actually allowed to take varies greatly. Most counselors feel free to judge the individual case when restricting the student load. A question which might be asked in this regard is, if limiting the class load is a legitimate counseling function after the student is on probation,

why not allow the student this same option before he is in academic trouble? In other words, why limit unpenalized withdrawal to the first few weeks of the semester?

An unlimited withdrawal proposal was taken before the Scholastic Standards Committee of the college and discussed at length. The discussion eventually took the form of several specific arguments for and against the proposal.

The arguments for the proposal were, first, that it would place more responsibility with the student for succeeding or failing in his classes. It was felt that, if the student had the option of withdrawing from the class up to or during the final examination, staying or leaving the class would call for a more mature decision. Any counselor who has listened to the student in trouble with his final examinations nurse an authority reaction over the inflexibility of college withdrawal rules can appreciate such an argument. A second argument for the change was that it would clarify the penalty grading practices of the college. The three withdrawal grades used by the college have never conveyed very precise meanings. Since the "WF" grade has such an adverse affect on the student's record, it would seem more reasonable to assign a single neutral grade for withdrawal from a class. A third argument in favor of the change was that it would encourage the kind of exploration we insist is a part of the junior college experience. Junior colleges have always prided themselves in their salvage function. Another way of describing the salvage function is to say that we intend to make successful students out of unsuccessful students. The most formidable obstacle we face in such an undertaking is the student's fear of failure. A student with a bad school experience in high school or another college could certainly profit from a removal of the threat of failure in the grading system. A system whereby the student could withdraw from a class at any time without penalty should have such an effect.

While the arguments for the proposal are in keeping with the junior college philosophy, the arguments against it are more practical and certainly worth consideration. It was argued that such a change could result in serious dislocation of teaching staff. If students tended to sign up for classes they had no intention of finishing in large numbers, such dislocation could take place. Planning for class scheduling could become much more difficult. A second argument emphasized a different aspect of the same affect. It was felt that unlimited withdrawal might encourage student irresponsibility with regard to persistence. Students who could succeed in a class might be tempted to take the easy way out and withdraw even though they were capable of "C" work in a class.

It was decided that the merits of the arguments for the proposal were worth the risk inherent in the arguments against it, and, since the arguments against the proposal involved measurable variables, it was decided to change to an unlimited withdrawal policy on a trial basis.

III Experimental Changes in Penalty Grading and Probation Practices

The study group: The study group which was used for determining the effects of the change in grading policy has been previously identified. Since the change to the grading system allowing students to withdraw until the final examination was to take place in the fall of 1967, experimental and control groups were readily identifiable. The first- and full-time freshmen enrolling in the fall of 1966 under the restricted withdrawal policy were used as controls. The first- and full-time freshmen enrolling in the fall of 1967 with the option of unrestricted withdrawal constituted the experimental group.

Anticipated effects of change: One of the major disadvantages of institutional research is that you are rarely afforded the luxury of dealing with a single

independent variable. This study is no exception. In the fall of 1967 there were actually three major changes introduced in the grading and probation practices of the college. The first was the "W" grading policy under discussion. The other two changes relate to probation and would probably, though not necessarily, affect the experimental group in the spring rather than the fall semester. The state-wide probation standard requiring students to be placed on probation when they fell below a 2.00 average went into effect in the fall of 1967. Knowledge of this change may have had some influence on entering freshmen or the grading practices of the instructional staff. Information from schools which changed to the 2.00 standard without instituting the "W" policy would help clarify the effect of the state directive, but such information is not available at this time. A second change in the probation practices of the school would more than likely affect only the spring statistics. When describing the probation practices at Shasta College, it was indicated that the student placed on probation would receive a letter at his home address informing him of his probationary status. While a check of the 1966 study group indicates that this letter may have an invigorating effect upon the student's grade point average, students below a 1.75 in the fall of 1966 raised their grade point averages far more than students between a 1.76 and a 2.00. The letter should not affect the beginning college student since he could not receive the letter until the completion of the fall semester. The fall grade reports of the students in the study group should, therefore, be far more indicative of the independent effect of the change to the "W" grading policy than the grade report for the second semester of the school year.

The relative importance of specific changes is a research question; the important practical question is what will the combined effects of the changes be?

The specific hypothesis of those favoring such a change was that the increase of withdrawal grades given would equal the reduction in the penalty ("D" and "F") grades given. The "W" policy might be considered to be encouraging student irresponsibility or causing scheduling disruptions if the withdrawal rate from classes greatly exceeded the reduction in penalty grades.

Results and discussion: The statistics below compare the total grades given in the fall of 1966 with the total grades given in the fall of 1967.

Table III

	Fall 1966	Fall 1967
Total grades given	12,211	13,782
Withdrawal grades given	W & WP 2193	W 3444
Percentage of withdrawal grades	18%	25%
G.P.A. penalty grades given	D 922	D 677
	F 317	F 39
	WF 128	------
Percentage of G.P.A. penalty grades ..	11%	5%
Percentage of withdrawal and penalty grades combined	29%	30%
Mean fall grade point average for first- and full-time freshmen ..	1.96	2.37

The comparative statistics demonstrate that students did not use the option of withdrawing from class until the final class meeting irresponsibly. While the number of students taking penalty grades has decreased, withdrawals from classes did not increase disproportionately. There has been no significant decrease in the percentage of students failing to complete classes with "C" or better grades. The following statistics show the percentage of increase which could have been expected in probation students in the study group when changing from a 1.75

probation standard to a 2.00 probation standard and the actual increase.

Table IV

Projected and Actual Fall Probation
Statistics for Full-time Freshmen

	Projected Fall 1967	Actual Fall 1967
Students with G.P.A. between .00 and 1.75	207 (25%)	103 (12%)
Students with G.P.A. between ~~.00~~ 1.75 and 2.00	83 (10%)	74 (10%)
Total expected on probation without "W" grade policy	290 (35%)	
Total actually on probation		177 (22%)

It can be seen from the projected figures above that without the "W" policy, changing from a 1.75 probation standard to a 2.00 probation standard could have increased the number of students going on probation by one-third.

There has not only been a lower percentage of students going on probation than the projected percentage, there were fewer students in terms of actual numbers with a grade point average below a 2.00 in fall 1967 than in fall 1966 with increased enrollment. Table five shows the overall comparative probation statistics for first- and full-time freshmen in the 1966-67 and 1967-68 school years. From all indications it would appear that the "W" grading system can be employed without undue cost to the withdrawal rate. The trend established in the fall semester continues into the spring semester. A clearer picture of changes in the probation rate is gained from the following table.

Table V

	Beginning Freshmen 1966-67 School Year	Beginning Freshmen 1967-68 School Year
2.00 G.P.A. or above for both fall and spring semesters.....	317 (43%)	481 (58%)
Below a 2.00 G.P.A. the fall semester only.....	90 (12%)	75 (09%)
Below a 2.00 G.P.A. the spring semester only.....	87 (12%)	72 (09%)
Below a 2.00 G.P.A. both fall and spring semester.....	119 (16%)	54 (06%)
Below a 2.00 G.P.A. the fall semester and withdrew.....	53 (07%)	48 (06%)
2.00 G.P.A. or above the fall semester and withdrew.....	71 (10%)	98 (12%)

IV Conclusions and Recommendations

Academic counseling of probationary students could improve with more attention to the initial choice of major by the student: Although no definite relationship can be assumed between specific choice of major and student success, the combined measures of student success indicate that such a relationship is likely. Further investigation should more specifically identify these majors; this knowledge will give the counselor additional information to assist the probationary student in making a realistic change of major. The data from this study showing a trend toward a low student success rate among groups of majors could be useful in dealing with new students in college orientation classes. Grouping students with high risk majors in the same college orientation class might prove helpful. Departments of the college having a large number of high risk majors, such as the Business Department, might certainly give some thought to the characteristics of the students they are attracting.

The "W" grading policy is an effective tool for protecting the student's grade point average: Since the concerns which were held regarding the unlimited withdrawal did not prove valid, the grading system should be retained. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to comment upon the communication among the staff preceding the institution of the actual change to the unlimited withdrawal policy, it is important to note that the entire teaching staff was notified far in advance that such a change was contemplated and were offered an opportunity to discuss the unlimited withdrawal proposal in a faculty meeting prior to its adoption. Many instructors have voiced the opinion that the new policy protects their own grading standard as well as the student's average. They no longer feel a pressure to carry the weak student with a passing grade he has not earned. An indication of the acceptance of the "W" grade is that at no time since its introduction has an instructor voiced a desire to return to the more restrictive withdrawal grade.